

# Listening

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# to learn



The Department for Education and Skills –  
involving children and young people

## **Progress Report**

**May 2003**



# Foreword



Children and young people are hugely important to us at the Department for Education and Skills. We need to find a variety of ways of ensuring their voices are heard.

I am personally committed to supporting the active involvement of children and young people across the Department. I have a vision of a Department which is accessible to children and young people and which genuinely values their views. We have made real progress towards that goal, building upon achievements in such areas as Connexions, since we published our action plan nearly twelve months ago. I am determined that we will do even better in the future.

I want the good practice already evident to influence the whole Department – and beyond. As a member of the new Ministerial Participation Network I will promote and support government-wide efforts to involve children and young people.

Involving children and young people must become part of the everyday actions of the whole Department – and we must show that such involvement has led to real changes to policies, services and behaviours. That is a priority for next year. Only then will we know that our vision is becoming a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Lewis'.

IVAN LEWIS

Minister for Young People and Adult Skills

"It makes you feel better that they don't just see you as children and that your views count"

*Darlington Open Day, 12 December 2002*

## What is this report about?

In June 2002 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published Listening to Learn - its action plan to involve children and young people. The plan set out what the Department wanted to achieve over the years to 2006. This report reviews our progress against that vision and plans.

### What have we done so far?

We have:

- Followed the first Consultation Day for children and young people at the DfES offices in London with similar days in our offices in Darlington and Sheffield
- Launched a survey of young people's opinions which will be repeated regularly to see whether views have changed. The first findings will be published later in 2003
- Worked with young people to develop a two-way communication channel with the Department which will allow:
  - Young people to give us their ideas, suggestions and queries

- The Department to communicate what we do and access young people's views

The original commitment in Listening to Learn to produce a 'rough guide' to the Department has grown into a more ambitious project. Four groups of young people from around the country have worked as creative directors with consultants. The young people presented their initial ideas to the Department and to representatives from the Children and Young People's Advisory Forum. We are continuing to work with them to develop their ideas which will use a wide range of communication channels including the innovative use of Information and Communications Technology.

"It was really useful, especially coming up with your own ideas and being left with a totally white board"

*Young person involved in the communications project*



“All the decisions they make affect us so it’s nice to have our say”

*Darlington Open Day, 12 December 2002*



- Consulted voluntary organisations and young people’s groups on plans for a DfES ‘Critical Friends’ Group of young people to advise Ministers, supported by regional groups
- Mounted one of the biggest consultations with young people – on 14-19 learning

In February 2002, we published a consultation paper ‘14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards’ which set out our proposals for an improved 14-19 phase of education and training.

Representatives of every secondary school and college in England were invited to one of 58 regional workshops, managed jointly by local education authorities (LEAs) and local arms of the Learning and Skills Council. For the first time, we produced a version of a consultation paper specifically for young people and through the Connexions Service we held informal events to discuss the proposals with them.

***See Case Study 1 to find out what happened as a result.***



- Begun work on material to support schools and LEAs on pupil consultation, including setting up a Young People's Advisory Group in parallel to an 'adult' group of officials and experts
- Involved young people in the development of important education policies - on play (**see Case Study 2**), 'tens to teens' (**see Case Study 3**), health and safety (**see Case Study 4**), improving behaviour and raising ethnic minority achievement for example

We launched the consultation document 'Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils' on 4 March 2003. We engaged the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to host workshops and carry out one to one interviews with young people. The research took place in London,

an area of high ethnic minority population, and East Sussex, an area where ethnic minority pupils are likely to be more dispersed.

- Commissioned a report on alcohol education from the Drug Education Forum

There were seven local events and one national event where young people presented their ideas to the then Minister for Young People and Learning Stephen Twigg. The report will inform revised guidance to schools on drug, alcohol and tobacco education and the developing National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.



- Continued to support the involvement of young people in the Connexions Service by:
  - Producing a young person's version of the Business Planning Guidance 2003-4 for Connexions Partnerships
  - Delivering training events for Government Office staff following successful sessions with staff in the Connexions Service National Unit.
- Issuing guidance to Connexions Partnerships on incentives and rewards for young people involved in shaping Connexions
- Involving young people from Peterborough and Merseyside in the redesign of the home page of the Connexions website [www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk). A new section 'Your Shout' encourages young people to give their views on Connexions

***See Case Study 5***

***See Case Study 6 for how two young people have made a difference***

"It's great to see that adults will let us come in to their workshop and take the lead on things."

*Young person delivering training for Connexions staff*



## How are we doing?

### How is DfES doing? (marks out of 10)

Sarah	3	Made a bit of a start, a lot more to do
Ross	4	It's a bit restrictive
Adam	5	Done a lot
Jack	6	You've made progress
Akousa	6	Efforts honestly been made, I wanna see results
Andrew	6	A good start, a lot more can be done

*Children and Young People's Advisory Forum, November 2002*

We are proud of our achievements but accept that there is more to do. By celebrating and promoting our success so far we can provide examples for others so that good practice is shared throughout the Department and with those who deliver our services. This report contains several such examples.

We have gained public recognition for our efforts. The Connexions Service was runner-up in the young people's category of the ippr/Guardian awards for Public Involvement announced in December 2002.







Ofsted identified that most Connexions Partnerships had involved young people.

### Connexions: the Ofsted view

- Most partnerships have made good efforts to involve young people in the development and implementation of the Connexions Service
- In the majority of partnerships, young people were significantly involved in the selection and appointment of Connexions staff and, as a result, increased their self-confidence and gained new skills and knowledge
- Young people made a substantial contribution to the design of Connexions publicity and information materials
- Some partnerships used the information gained from consultation with young people to determine policies and procedures and to improve services
- Young people who were involved in the development of materials and services felt that they had played an important part in setting up the partnership
- Strategies to involve young people are most successful where the partnership draws on the existing practice and expertise of partners

*Connexions Partnerships: the first year 2001-2002, Ofsted 2002*

On the 14-19 consultation we received *4000 written responses from our consultation with young people* and heard their views through a number of face to face events **(see Case Study 1)**. Their strong support for the increased choice we were proposing to offer, with options provided through school, college and the workplace, encouraged us to press ahead with these reforms as quickly as possible. Their agreement with the principle of an overarching award at 19 and their concern that the different routes through education were not easy to understand influenced our decision to ask an external working group to consider both these issues.

There is a sub-group specifically looking at consulting young people.





## How have we involved children and young people?

The type of involvement has been very wide as the extract from the Ofsted Connexions Report above shows. A range of activities, including some highly innovative methods, have been used to ensure participation by children and young people of different ages and backgrounds. Consultations with very young people have involved the use of drawings, role-play using phones and story telling using puppets.

The use of 'mystery shoppers' also figures in at least two initiatives: this approach has been piloted with Lincolnshire and Rutland Connexions Partnership using young people as mystery shoppers and the Department is using a similar approach to check the views of young people on qualifications.

On the communications project young people have acted as 'creative directors', working with creative professionals to develop marketing ideas and design campaign and communication material.

## What more are we planning to do?

We have only just begun. During the last year we started action on a wide range of fronts and we will sustain and develop that action as well as launching new initiatives.

There are three broad areas where we will focus our efforts.

“We know what young people are going through and we know what attracts them”

*Young person involved in the communications project*





## Building on success

We will continue to promote and support the active involvement of children and young people in key areas such as the Connexions Service and 14-19 developments.

There will be a particular focus on schools. We will support schools to involve pupils, building on the introduction of citizenship education and reinforced by the 14-19 plans including their emphasis on 'wider activities' such as community involvement.

From September 2003 it will be possible for pupils to be appointed as associate members of school governing bodies.

Ofsted inspectors have always sought to take the views of young people into account in a variety of informal ways. However, from September 2003 this will be taken a step further, as all inspections will now include an opportunity for all pupils and students to have their say about what most concerns them in their education, by responding to questionnaires.

We will continue to involve children and young people in developing policies on behaviour, ethnic minority achievement and school buildings and design.

The principle of involving young people is being built in from the start to new initiatives.

Through the London Challenge young people from five Connexions groups in London are helping to shape the strategy for London schools. Thirty-six teenagers met Stephen Twigg at the House of Commons in February 2003 when they raised issues including bullying, drugs and the quality of teaching. Their views will influence the Department's action plan for supporting London schools.

"Everyone seemed to get on our wavelength ... they knew what we were saying, what we wanted"

*Young person involved in the communications project*





## Supporting DfES Staff

We have put together a package of training, development, support and guidance which responds to the needs of all staff.

- We will deliver training workshops, co-facilitated by young people
- We will produce 'signposting' guidance for staff, which summarises the main principles and methods of participation and refers staff to more detailed guidance or sources of help
- Through outside agencies we will make available specialised consultancy support to staff when needed
- In addition we plan to support staff by making available good practice examples more systematically. We will build on the 'Observatory' of good practice on involving young people in Connexions by developing a DfES-wide system
- We are preparing a guide for DfES staff on writing for young people



## Measuring the Impact

We must establish the impact of our efforts – has involving young people made a difference?

We are developing a growing body of information from surveys and research which yields evidence for the positive impact of participation but, where there are gaps in our evidence, we will commission new research or supplement existing studies. We will develop impact measures and we will review existing standards for participation to consider how they might be applied to our work.

“To be honest I was a bit reluctant, thinking it would be one-sided, but it’s been excellent and if you could do it more often it would help”

*Darlington Open Day,  
12 December 2002*



## How do I find out more?

For further information or enquiries, please contact:

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This report may be downloaded from the DfES website **[www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn)**



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